



HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

**HB0336: Maryland Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Program -
Materials for Individualized Education Program Meetings**

January 31, 2024

Position: Support

The Arc Maryland is a statewide advocacy and service organization that works to protect and advance the rights and quality of life of people with disabilities.

Maryland ABLE accounts help individuals with disabilities save money and pay for qualified disability-related expenses without losing the federal and state benefits they need, like SSI or Medicaid benefits.

Unfortunately, even as the program has been available in Maryland for several years, many people are unaware of this important resource.

SB0336 requires local school systems to provide, to parents of students with disabilities and IEPs, certain written informational materials regarding the Maryland ABLE Program on at least an annual basis. As most studies say that people need to hear about something 7 times before they remember it, it may still take time for parents to take note and act on the information, but we will have greater confidence they know about the program and its potential benefits for their children.

As a related note, there is another parent notification bill working its way through the federal legislative process at this time: The "Think Differently About Education Act"ⁱ That bill would require schools to notify parents before their child's first IEP meeting each academic year of their right to include experts and other third parties in such meetings. For parents, this might mean inviting a lawyer, an education advocate, therapist or other SME or a family member with knowledge of the child. Although the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act already gives parents the right to involve third parties in IEP meetings, most families are unaware of their rights to do so. Adding this notification to what is provided to the parents, in addition to information about ABLE accounts, would be a game changer for transparency in Maryland.

For more information, please contact:

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ⁱ <https://www.disabilityscoop.com/2023/09/19/house-panel-advances-bill-clarifying-parents-rights-at-iep-meetings/30553/>